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ABSTRACT

Funded through local resources and an ESEA Title IV-C Federal grant, Project RISE (Regional In-Service Education) is an inservice center serving teachers, administrators and support staff in public and private schools in east-central Connecticut. During the planning year, the professional growth needs of teachers of grades K-8 were assessed. Staff development "planning teams" were established at every school in a five-town region. These teams reviewed the needs assessment, cooperatively planned school-based programs to meet the expressed needs, and suggested programs appropriate for town-wide and regional presentation. Today Project RISE serves nine rural towns. RISE consultant/advisors are assigned to a limited number of schools, visiting approximately one-half day per week and/or as requested. The RISE Learning Exchange center is open for specific hours and has specific themes, people, projects and/or materials. Curriculum development is conducted at the regional level. Project RISE also helps teachers achieve their growth goals. More emphasis is placed on university and community involvement. Decisions are made by a teacher governing board, the school planning teams, the project director, a Teacher Advisory Board, and a Superintendents' Advisory Board. Project RISE's long-range plans are to meet the concerns of all groups--teachers, principals, superintendents, boards. (NQ)

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Teachers' Centers Exchange

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A Teachers' Center for Nine Rural Towns—

Can Grassroots Grow from Seeds Planted on Top?

BY PETER MARTIN

Project RISE (Regional In-Service Education) did not begin as a grassroots teacher movement. It began when a principal, Mr. Robert Warren, and I sat down to talk about how to provide more resources for teacher growth. I was not teaching at the time but had been working off and on as a consultant with the school system, and had frequent contact with many teachers. Most of our teachers had never heard of a teachers' center. Almost all were familiar with in-service workshops, which were often viewed as a waste of valuable time. Since many boards of education in our primarily rural part of the state tend to view on-the-job growth time as a frill, even the "growth opportunity" of in-service workshops was a major victory. After all, teachers go to college to learn to be teachers. Why should a town waste its resources on "teaching teachers who already know how to teach?"

We still find this attitude in several of our towns.

The school principal told me about a funding source for in-service education. He asked me to list the components of a good staff development program, and then helped me translate those components into the kind of objectives that would be impressive in a grant proposal. My ideas came from my work as a former teacher in Hartford, Connecticut, my experiences with many of the teachers' centers in the state, and my general perceptions of teachers' needs gained from working as a classroom consultant in Colchester, the town that would sponsor Project RISE. We invited all interested teachers and administrators to come to a meeting and share their ideas for establishing a regional staff development center. People came from five towns, ideas were generated, and we scrambled to write the final draft of a Title IV-C proposal before the deadline. To our genuine sur-

prise, the Connecticut State Department of Education allocated \$30,000 of Title IV-C funds for our 1976-77 planning year. (We have expanded to nine towns in 1977-78 and plan no further additions.)

Needs Assessment in School Meetings

Our primary objective for Project RISE during the planning year was to assess the professional growth needs of teachers of grades K-8, and plan viable ways to meet these needs through regional cooperation. Using the expertise of our project evaluator, Mrs. Joan Baron of the University of Connecticut, we designed an open-ended, face-to-face procedure to identify staff development needs that were perceived by teachers, principals, and superintendents. Teacher needs were described in a group process ("round robin" and "chat" groups) con-

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Project RISE

Project RISE (Regional In-Service Education) is an in-service center serving teachers, administrators, and support staff in public and private schools in east-central Connecticut. The Project currently serves nine towns (Andover, Bozrah, Colchester, East Haddam, Franklin, Hebron, Lebanon, Marlborough, and Salem). RISE is funded through local resources and an ESEA Title IV-C federal grant (Project No. 028-923-4-7-2), with a total 1977-78 budget of \$70,000. Dr. Peter Martin, director of Project RISE, was formerly with the Center for Open Education at Storrs, Connecticut, has been a consultant to several Connecticut school systems, and was a teacher with the Hartford Public Schools. For further information, write to Project RISE, Halls Hill School, Halls Hill, Colchester, Connecticut 06415.

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ducted with the staffs of each school in the five towns. Principals and superintendents were interviewed separately. Each group was asked: "In order for Project RISE to be successful in aiding teachers' professional growth, what would have to happen?" The responses to this question were compiled at the meetings, and then ranked according to importance by all the participants. These findings were then ranked in priority order, and circulated for feedback.

Teacher-perceived needs included those in the area of curriculum *development* (updating or creating curriculum guides in the various disciplines—developing metrics curriculum, career education, science, social studies, language arts), as well as needs in the area of curriculum *implementation* (individualizing instruction for the gifted, slow learner, learning disabled; fresh, meaningful activities for the rest of the class while the teacher works with a group; mainstreaming; setting up learning centers). Providing resources for curriculum implementation also emerged as a major area of need (generating new places to visit; establishing a teacher resource center; organizing audiovisual materials and making media programs; obtaining classroom resource people to make presentations to the children; offering classes on how to write grants for special school or class projects). Many needs were identified that deal with teacher-student and student-student interactions (better ways to handle behavior problems; developing students' pride in themselves and their work; developing student responsibility and self-discipline), and those that relate to record-keeping and student evaluation (developing simple but effective record-keeping systems; developing honest student evaluations and consistent grading systems).

Teachers noted a number of needs stemming from their professional and personal roles (ways for "maintaining teacher sanity"; how to get published; increasing teachers' personal time; improving staff morale; increasing communication among staff; providing school time for sharing, brainstorming, and

planning). Another important area of need concerned teachers' relationships with the community (increasing parental participation and involvement; selling educational programs to the town; decreasing community criticism of the teaching profession).

To a considerable extent, staff needs as perceived by principals tended to overlap those which the teachers themselves had identified. There were subtle differences, however. Principals seemed to place more emphasis on formal curriculum work than teachers, and much less emphasis on activities that would develop the rights, "ego," or stature of the teacher as a person and professional. As might be expected, resources for actually implementing the curriculum were of greater concern to the teachers than to the principals. Not surprisingly, staff needs as perceived by superintendents were generally broader, "loftier," and more abstract than those mentioned by either the teachers or principals (help teachers assist children to survive in a highly complex society; provide opportunities for teaching outside the school, to help students understand the relationship of man to nature and man to man in the natural environment; work with staffs in system-wide curriculum development and articulation). On the other hand, the manner in which a few of the superintendents expressed staff needs indicated a rather low level of respect for the teacher as professional (help teachers develop a curriculum management system and overcome their resistance to the teacher as manager; retrain experienced teachers).

Planning Teams at Each School

Our next step was to establish staff development "planning teams" at every school in the five-town region. These teams were (and are) comprised of the school principal and teacher volunteers from each grade level or grade cluster. We have no fewer than one teacher representative for every two grade levels. No volunteers were refused, therefore some levels have more representatives than other levels. A Project RISE staff member acted as a facilitator at the planning team meetings. The task of the teams during the planning year was to review the results of the needs assessment and cooperatively plan school-based programs to meet the expressed needs. The teams also suggested programs appropriate for town-wide and regional presentation. In many cases this was the first opportunity teachers had had to make decisions about staff development. At first the format was somewhat uncomfortable for a number of the principals who were unaccustomed to teacher involvement at this level. Some of the discomfort also stemmed from the fact that at early meetings there were no clear-cut guidelines or expectations for the operation of the teams.

The facilitator role of the Project RISE staff mem-



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ber was a delicate one. Principals needed to come away from the meetings without feeling "rail-roaded." Their support and personal commitment were needed so that in-service days could be provided for the programs that were generated. At the same time it was essential to encourage teachers to "open up," make suggestions, and make real decisions. At one planning team meeting there were long periods of silence when the teachers were unwilling to take the first step and get to the business of decision making. It was tempting for the RISE facilitator and the principal to step in and take over. The temptation was resisted and finally some of the teachers began to share their ideas, perhaps simply to break the awkward silence. At the end of the session one teacher said to me in a quiet, almost apologetic voice, "You know, Peter, teachers aren't used to making decisions like this—this is going to take some getting used to." In contrast, meetings at one school had the flavor of a bargaining unit at contract time, with vociferous teachers who sometimes made it difficult for the principal to get a word in edgewise. At still other meetings (all too few) it was obvious that the teachers and principal had previously established a



cooperative relationship and we could immediately get to the business at hand.

During the last round of planning team meetings at some schools this past year we instituted a formal voting procedure on issues regarding the needs that should be addressed, and the content or organization of in-service day workshops and other activities. In the formal procedure all participants had one vote but the principal had veto power, primarily because the principal is (or should be) the educational leader of the school, is aware of central office mandates, and is outnumbered by the teachers. However, the formal procedure has been dropped as teachers and their principals have become more accustomed to working cooperatively in an informal atmosphere. Most schools have had three to five planning team meetings in the past year (on after-school time). The needs assessment results for a given school have been defined, refined, and translated into programs for which in-service time has been given in all but one town. In this case a resistant board has "come around" and we have several in-service half-days available there this year.

Our planning year budget was inadequate for doing much more than workshops. However, even

these were a source of considerable pride for the planning team teachers, who have now seen many of their ideas reach the level of real activities. Their input is clearly reflected in the workshops; many sessions have included both a lecture and the actual production or review of practical materials within the same session. It was clear from the needs assessment that teachers were tired of "pie-in-the-sky" workshops that were almost impossible to translate into actual classroom practice. One teacher observed: "You don't get enough theory in a workshop to do any good—one- or two-shot workshops *have* to be practical or they're wasted." A number of schools have moved away from the one-shot "make-and-take" workshop format. Planning teams in several places are working on topics that will last from four to six months, including several in-service days, released-time for off-site visits in conjunction with the topic, and after-school gatherings. These teams clearly want to explore topics in-depth rather than through a shotgun approach. I call these our "Phase Two" schools.

Our major problem with the planning team approach is the lack of an adequate attempt to make team members truly represent their colleagues. We are concerned that planning teams may rapidly become "in-groups" that leave the rest of the staff behind in a cloud of dust. We are exploring a number of steps to overcome this difficulty. In one approach, for example, a planning team member would take charge of in-school communications. This person would have the specific responsibility of seeing that planning team members actively seek out the ideas of other teachers at their grade levels, and that they communicate with the staff concerning any decisions made in team meetings. Another strategy is that planning team members rotate, serving for no more than two years, so that eventually all teachers will have participated. The two-year rotation could be staggered in order to permit half the membership to be retained for stability in any given year.

Consultant/Advisors at Every School

The problem of communication was reduced when our RISE consultant/advisors became available this year (1977-78). Each of these people is assigned to a limited number of schools, visiting approximately one-half day per week (we wish it could be more) and/or on a request basis. They are key people in fostering a continual on-the-spot kind of needs assessment, as well as serving as needs-fulfillers in an informal, non-evaluative manner. I believe our consultant/advisors are essential to the success of our total support system. These are the people who help build egos. They help ensure that large-group workshops grow from real needs, and that the workshops are followed by personalized in-classroom assistance

when needed. Working with principals, the consultant/advisors will also foster buddy-system approaches, set up work groups, curriculum study groups, and other in-school growth activities. They conduct mini-workshops in their areas of expertise and encourage staff members to do likewise.

For those who are contemplating the creation of a total teacher growth system, I cannot think of a more important element than the consultant/advisor. If only a limited amount of federal money became available for a teachers' center, I would allocate most of it for the advisors. They can be master teachers from the system who are given a professional leave at



their regular salary; or they can be half-time on staff and half-time doing graduate study at a nearby university or college. We are using a combination of the above arrangements.

My enthusiasm for the consultant/advisor comes from my experience working in this capacity for several years. During this time I have seen teachers' centers locate scrounged space, use scrounged materials, and do unbelievable things on a shoestring budget. But I have never seen a center with scrounged advisors. Good people cost money which many school systems seem unwilling to provide. It is in this area that federal dollars may make the critical difference.

Teachers' Center Serving the Nine Towns

As part of our growth system we have a physical teachers' center, that is, a *place* in addition to our on-site services. We began to develop the place, which we call the RISE Learning Exchange, in summer 1977. Teachers spent three weeks with me in July planning the initial design and construction work. They received three University of Connecticut graduate credits for the experience. Teachers' center development will continue throughout 1978 on a voluntary basis, and with the help of our consultant/advisors. The center will reflect the experiences of teachers as they participate in and conduct workshops, involve themselves in curriculum development work, and experiment with the ideas they will later try with students. Our needs assessment indicated that a *materials-based* center would be most successful, initially at least. We are attempting to establish two atmospheres within the RISE Learning Exchange. One is a "make-and-take," build-it, scrounge-it, copy-it, use-it type of atmosphere; the

other is to encourage the quiet study of materials and ideas, and foster introspection, reflection, and thoughtful discussion. We do not have the luxury of enough space for both atmospheres to exist simultaneously, and must divide time rather than space.

At first, we weren't sure we wanted a physical space. We now serve nine towns and for some the center is a half-hour drive from their schools. We toyed with the idea of a center on wheels but couldn't afford an appropriate vehicle. However, thus far this year we have had a good mix of teachers from all our towns attending even the voluntary after-school workshops. Our preliminary conclusion is affirmative—a physical center appears to be a meaningful part of our total support system. We expect that about 15% of the total number of about 350 K-8 teachers in the nine towns combined will make regular voluntary use of the facility, and that there will be more frequent use by the primary teachers than the intermediate teachers. But we may be in for some surprises. A great deal depends on the grade levels of teachers who choose to be most active in developing the center.

We are going to make little attempt to house extensive audiovisual equipment, films, or pre-packaged materials. Our population base is not sufficient to warrant a major effort in this area. We would rather put our dollars toward people. No one staffs the center as a full-time drop-in facility. We are open for specific hours and have specific themes, people, projects, and/or materials that are well-advertised. I don't think a rural teachers' center can work if it is of the "drop in and see what happens" variety. Few teachers will make a half-hour drive without knowing that a definite need of theirs will be met at the end of the line.

Curriculum Development at the Regional Level

Much of our in-service work will be of only short-term impact if attempts are not made to tie our efforts into formal curricula. Curriculum development appeared as a major need in our assessment, and for good reason. Our towns are too small and underfinanced to keep anyone on their staffs specifically to mind the curriculum development store. We have a haphazard mishmash in many curricular areas—few goals, poor articulation through the grades, and an over-dependence on single texts. Where no series of texts that spans the grades is available, as is generally the case in science and social studies (and math in some towns), there are no guidelines at all.

Formal curriculum development will first take place at the regional level. Teachers, administrators, RISE staff, and outside specialists (when appropriate) will develop skeleton curricula in several areas. Our greatest areas of need appear to be in social

studies, science, metrics, and career education. (The latter is now state-mandated in Connecticut.) Environmental education is another curricular need which we may tie to the science and social studies areas. Arts have also suffered greatly in our area and may be a priority in the coming year. The skeleton curricula will then be taken to the school level to be "fleshed out" and made school-specific by local



teachers and administrators. I expect the teacher governing board may want many center activities to revolve around the emerging curricula, providing specific ideas for curriculum development and implementation. The curricula will also provide a sound basis for many of our local and regional workshops, and will result in the surfacing of specific teacher needs which our consultant/advisors can help to fulfill.

Helping Teachers Achieve Their Growth Goals

Teacher evaluation plans (state-mandated in Connecticut) are currently being evolved by teachers and administrators in our towns. The state guidelines encourage the school system to delineate teacher responsibilities and to devise effective means of determining how well these responsibilities are being met by the teacher. The guidelines state that evaluation should be for the purposes of helping teachers improve their performance and that teachers' dignity and self-respect should be enhanced in the evaluation process. Generally the evaluator (often the principal) and the teacher will mutually agree on certain areas in which teacher growth would be desirable. These areas can then be translated into professional growth objectives for the year.

The fulfillment of these objectives can be an important entry point for the resources of our teacher support system. We are on call to assist teachers in achieving their formal growth goals. To some extent we can rate our own success by the degree to which Project RISE resources contribute to improvements in teachers' follow-up evaluations.

University and Community Involvement

We have actively sought the cooperation of the School of Education of the University of Connecticut at Storrs. We work most closely with the Schools'

Center for Open Education, a center without walls which provides us with invaluable assistance in obtaining both University and non-University resource people, gives us access to a private funding source to help support our consultant/advisory system, jointly sponsors major workshops and area conferences with us, and assists in setting up University courses designed by our planning teams and offered in our schools.

Our efforts to involve community people in our project have been minimal during our planning year. Community and parent involvement is, however, a major objective for 1977-78. One of the more critical issues facing our area is a deteriorating level of community support for the work of the schools. Poor communication appears to be an important contributing factor. Project RISE will provide the initiative for the formation of a school-community relations council composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and non-parents from the nine towns we serve. The purpose of the council will be to discuss and recommend ways to improve school-community relations. The recommendations will be disseminated by the Project to the appropriate parties at the local level. During 1977-78, we are opening to the community the teacher workshops that bear on the concerns of parents. Special parent workshops are also being designed.



Decision Making at Several Levels

A teacher governing board is being established this fall. The day-to-day operation of the teachers' center and its activities will be under the decision-making power of the teacher board. The school planning teams (teachers and principal) will continue to be responsible for planning in-school activities for which released or in-service day time is provided, with a Project RISE consultant again serving as facilitator.

As project director, I will be responsible for regional or mini-regional programs that cross town lines but do not emanate from the teachers' center. As the result of our efforts in the past year, most of our nine boards of education have voted to share the same calendar for in-service half-days. (While towns have varying numbers of such days, common dates will be shared.) This permits us to offer a number of regional programs. On a given date, one school may host a special program for kindergarten teachers

from all the towns, another for grades 1-3 people, and so on. Music, art, and physical education teachers are now able to get together for programs designed around their specific needs. In making decisions about such programs, I utilize the advice of the local planning teams in the schools involved and also am responsive to the superintendents.

The operation of the advisory system will be the shared responsibility of the project director and the teachers' center governing board. Each advisor is available for activities at the teachers' center approximately one half-day per week. This part of their duties will shortly come under the jurisdiction of the teacher governing board. The remainder of their time is spent in schools and in their own professional growth activities (visiting other centers, preparing



workshops, exploring new resources for teachers, other research). These duties are coordinated by the project director in conjunction with the local planning teams in whose schools the consultants work.

Finally, the operation of the entire project is now governed by an interdistrict board composed of one member from each of the nine boards of education. In Connecticut, interdistrict boards have the same legal authority as a single-town board of education. The Teacher Advisory Board and the Superintendents' Advisory Board both provide input to our interdistrict board, and can make formal recommendations on which the board takes action.

This is a complex system, but it stems from an important need. All groups—teachers, principals, superintendents, boards—must be able to have their concerns met in some way through out project. Our long-range future depends on it. On the other hand, a special place must be carved out for direct responsiveness to teachers' concerns and must be carefully protected from "over-compromise" by the other groups. Otherwise we will have created a system for teacher coercion rather than for teacher support and growth.

Evolution of Our Teacher Growth System: Some Guiding Principles

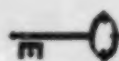
Our teachers have expressed a priority need to learn ways of providing better for individual differences in the classroom. This need has been stated in several ways: how to work more effectively with exceptional children, how to manage various types of grouping, how to create or locate curriculum materials that make greater individualization possible. Even

aspects of classroom discipline are related to this topic, including certainly the concern for humane behavior and the importance of dealing with children as people. Providing more effectively for individuals, then, is the theme of Project RISE.

But now to the how and why. When teachers are involved in a workshop or any growth opportunity, I think many of them see the faces of particular children—the people they are going to have to deal with at 8:30 the next morning. If they cannot make a connection between those faces and what is happening in the "growth opportunity," why are they there? There is a sense of urgency, felt only by the practicing classroom teacher, which accompanies those faces that the teacher carries with her to workshops, on visits, or home at night. I left teaching because faces—that urgency—filled more of my life than I thought was healthy for me or for the children.

I wonder about teachers' center people who say their center has progressed beyond the "what-to-do-on-Monday" syndrome. Does this statement imply that all of the teachers they serve no longer worry about Monday and children's faces, nor feel a sense of urgency in their work? Or does the statement indicate that the center staff members themselves have evolved to a "higher" plane simply because they are several steps removed from the urgency of the classroom? I believe that at least some of the teachers must still be worried about Monday, even though others may well have moved beyond.

It seems to me that there might be a hierarchy of teacher needs. By this, I mean various levels of needs that are ordered such that, as with Maslow's hierarchy, the first level must be satisfied before the others can even be considered. Certainly the need to feel successful (desired, loved, appreciated) as a



person would be at the first level. The next level might encompass the need to feel successful as a teacher on terms established by the educational community (by fellow teachers, principal, children, parents). A third level would perhaps include the need to feel successful as a teacher on terms established within the self.

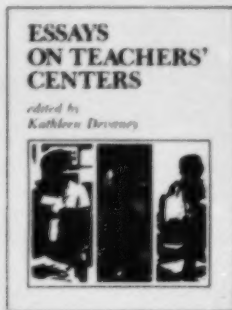
Needs at the first level (having to do with teacher as successful person) can be continually met through encouraging the individual to share special talents, both with the children and with fellow teachers, through meeting teachers on their terms, through praising, rewarding, "mirror-making," and other reinforcements. The necessity of satisfying these basic needs never ends.

The "make-and-take, what-to-do-Monday" centers provide meaningful services for people with

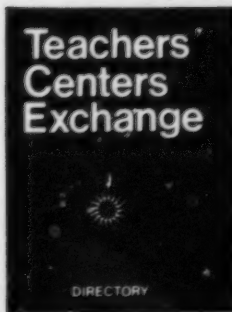
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PUBLICATIONS

In 1977 the Teachers' Center Exchange published two books relating to the work of teachers' centers. These books are available from Order Department, Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103. Payment must accompany order. California residents please add appropriate sales tax.



Essays on Teachers' Centers, edited by Kathleen Devaney, is a collection of twelve essays about inservice experiences that engage teachers' talents and energies while offering intellectual and emotive stimulation and support. Articles are included on the role of the in-classroom advisor, teacher design of classroom curriculum, and discussions of the varied learning principles underlying teachers' center development and practice. Contributors are Maja Apelman, Sharon Feiman, William Fibkins, Lilian Katz, Robert Mai, Theodore Manolakes, Milbrey McLaughlin, Thomas O'Brien, Adelaide Sproul, and L.C. Taylor. The writings were gathered during 1976 from educators in and around teachers' centers in the United States and England. A selected, annotated bibliography is provided. 199 pp. \$6.00 prepaid.



Teachers' Centers Exchange Directory, by Jeanne Lance and Ruth Kreitzman, is a reference work describing the "naturally formed, interactive network" of teachers' centers with whom the Exchange is in contact. Descriptions written to a common format provide highlights of program, resources, staff, setting, and other information about 78 teachers' centers in the United States. A foreword by Kathleen Devaney gives a brief introduction to commonalities among teachers' centers and outlines the purposes of the Exchange. An annotated bibliography, compiled by Gretchen Thomas and Marda Woodbury, lists curriculum publications produced by teachers' center staffs. 207 pp. \$6.50 prepaid.

Also available: Occasional Paper No. 1, **Surveying Teachers' Centers—from Grassroots Beginnings to Possibility of Federal Support**, by Kathleen Devaney, April 1977. Free. Order from Teachers' Centers Exchange, Far West Laboratory, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103.

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needs at the second level. They can help the teacher feel successful on terms defined by the school (having enough activities to keep five reading groups going, making sense out of the Elementary Science Study program, having colorful bulletin boards and a bag of tricks for good classroom control). It is important to satisfy these needs, and in my opinion they should not be viewed with disdain. Once teachers begin to feel successful on the schools' terms, it is possible for them to move beyond the urgency of Monday. Survival is no longer a question and that kind of frantic mindlessness can gradually subside. New ideas and suggestions don't seem so threatening. Criticism can be handled more easily; long-range planning and more profound thinking have a chance to take place. Enter the Stage Two center for people with needs at the third level. This center recognizes that some make-and-take work with materials will continue to be of importance to teachers, but that they may be ready for greater introspection, reflection, philosophical discussions, thought-

ful curriculum development, and the sharing of self with others.

Since it is entirely unlikely that a center's teachers are all at the same stage of development, it seems of great importance to provide for the various need levels within the total support system. This can be reflected in the design of the teachers' center to accommodate both the make-and-takers, and the people who have reached a more reflective stage. Recognition of levels of need is also important in the



hiring of consultant/advisors, some of whom have workshop-type hands-on talents, and some who are capable of turning on the philosophers, curriculum developers, researchers, and careful planners. The specific programs and services that the center offers can be designed for a variety of need levels, and certainly *will* be if teachers of all kinds are involved in center governance.

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